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"We don't know how far along they are in terms of the readiness of the scripts (of movies coming here). So we're nervous." Brian Baker of the Directors Guild

ARTS

Movies planned for Montreal have finished scripts

BUT REWRITES COULD BE AN ISSUE

Strike is latest challenge on local film scene

BRENDAN KELLY
THE GAZETTE

It will likely take months for the Montreal film-shoot scene to feel the impact of the Hollywood screenwriters strike that kicked off Monday. But it's just one more headache for a local film scene that's been plagued with labour-relations woes for the past few years.

"Are other industries so full of turmoil?" asked Hans Fraikin, the film commissioner at the Quebec Film and Television Council. "It always comes down to the labour issues."

For three years, the Montreal production scene was dogged by a lingering conflict between two rival film-technicians unions who were fighting over who had the right to represent Quebec technicians. The bitter dispute seared away several major Hollywood film productions before it was finally resolved in February.

The Quebec production milieu was also hurt by a strike at the start of the year by the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), the country's main actors union. The six-week actors strike also ended in February.

The American filming scene has been booming since those two conflicts were resolved. But now Fraikin has another labour dispute to worry about with the start Monday of a strike by the Writers Guild of America. The silver lining is that the Hollywood films set to shoot in Montreal in coming months already have finished scripts in place, according to Fraikin. So the productions won't be affected by the U.S. writers strike.

"What it really affects is TV shows and we don't have any right now," said Fraikin, on the phone yesterday from Los Angeles where he was attending the American Film Market.

The strike will have a much more immediate impact in Vancouver because that city attracts a large number of U.S. TV series.

The one issue for films is rewrites. If the script is finished and the studio is satisfied with the latest draft, shooting can be given if the writers are on the picket line. But Writers Guild of America members are forbidden from working on rewrites of movie scripts during the strike.

"Of the potential movies coming, we don't know how far along they are in terms of the readiness of the scripts," said Brian Baker, a Montreal-based business agent with the Directors Guild of Canada. "So we're nervous. Any movie I've ever been involved in, there's been rewriting right up to the shooting."

Two 20th Century Fox movies – the Roland Emmerich-directed Fantastic Voyage and the manga adaptation Dragonball Z – are expected to shoot in Montreal early next year. It is unclear if the writers' strike will have any impact on these shoots.

The main issues for the Writers Guild of America are compensation for work used in new-media platforms like the Internet and fees for films and TV shows released on DVD.

Fraikin has spent the past week trying to promote shooting in Quebec at the American Film Market, the leading U.S. film-industry event of the year, and he said the threat of the strike has not dampened producers enthusiasm for looking into the possibility of making films in Quebec.

"We'll see concrete projects come out of this," said Fraikin. "People are looking forward. They're not letting the strike hold them back. Business goes on."

Yesterday, the Writers Guild of Canada announced that it is in full support of the strike by the Writers Guild of America. The Canadian writers guild also notified its members about what they can and cannot do during the U.S. screenwriters strike. If a writer is a dual member of both the Canadian and American writers guilds, and lives in the U.S., he or she is not allowed to write for American or Canadian productions for the duration of the strike. But if the writer is a dual member of both guilds and lives in Canada, he or she is entitled to write for fully-Canadian films and TV shows.

At any time, if a dual member living in the U.S. wants to write for a Canadian production, he or she has to obtain a special waiver from the Writers Guild of America to write for the Canadian movie or TV show, and the Writers Guild of America is not issuing any such waivers right now.

bkelly@thegazette.canwest.com

Hay takes the Giller

LATE NIGHTS ON AIR WINS $40,000

Yellowknife love story deemed best novel

ADAM MCDOWELL
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

TORONTO – Elizabeth Hay is on the air. The author took her place among Canada's leading literary lights by winning the 2007 Scotiabank Giller Prize for her novel Late Nights on Air.

"I feel lucky," said Hay upon accepting the award from Giller founder Jack Rabinovitch. "So lucky. I'll probably be hit by a truck tomorrow. So it's important that I say my thank-yous now."

Literary scene watchers have suggested that a win for Hay would secure the writer a place among the country's literary elite – alongside names like Ondaatje, Vassanji, Atwood and Gowdy.

Late Nights on Air beat out some 108 other English-language Canadian books to become the winner on what host Seamus O'Regan called "the most important night in Canadian literature" – not least because, as O'Regan noted, the average winner receives a reported 388-per-cent post-Giller sales boost.

Hay was born in Owen Sound, Ont., and has lived in Ottawa since 1992. She worked for CBC Radio in Yellowknife, Winnipeg and Toronto before switching to writing fiction. Her first novel, A Student of Weather, was nominated for a Giller in 2000. Her second, Garbo Laughs, was shortlisted for a Governor General's Award in 2003.

Late Nights on Air, based in part on Hay's own experiences, tells the story of an eccentric group of people working for CBC Radio Yellowknife in the 1970s.

The winner was chosen shortly before the gala award ceremony in Toronto at the Four Seasons Yorkville.

Anyone could have emerged as the winner from a shortlist that mixed established heavyweights – M.G. Vassanji and Michael Ondaatje – with the less well-known Daniel Poliquin and Alissa York. But Elizabeth Hay, according to table chatter, deserved to win the prize because she has paid her dues as a Canadian writer.

The other nominees were:

■ Ondaatje, for Divisadero, a novel split into two parts – the first about a farming family in Northern California in the 1970s, the second about a woman researching the life of a French writer;

■ Daniel Poliquin, for A Secret Between Us, the story of the mischievous Lusignan, an ex-First World War soldier who's trying to seduce his way into the life of a wealthy single woman;

■ Alissa York, for Effigy, a tale of polygamy and taxidermy set in 19th-century Utah;

PETER J. THOMPSON/ CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

In Elizabeth Hay's Late Nights on Air, a man who falls in love with a voice on air discovers the real woman is even more than he imagined.

CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Daniel Poliquin was nominated for the Giller Prize for his book, A Secret Between Us. It was translated from French by Montreal's Donald Winkler.

■ Vassanji, for The Assassin's Song, which tells the story of Karsan Dargawalia, an Indian man who turns his back on centuries of religious and family tradition to emigrate to the West.

Retired businessman Jack Rabinovitch founded the prize in 1994 in honour of his late wife Doris Giller, a literary journalist who had died of cancer the year before. Vassanji won the inaugural $35,000 prize for The Book of Secrets.

The prize's association with Scotiabank allowed it to bump the winner's purse up to the current $40,000 beginning in 2005, and runners-up now receive $2,500 each plus a leather-bound copy of their book.

The panel consisted of David Bergen, the 2005 Giller winner for The Time In Between; Camilla Gibb, a 2005 nominee for Sweetness in the Belly; and Lena Goodison, an acclaimed artist and writer who has published nine books of poetry.

Vassanji and Ondaatje have a second shot at winning a literary prize this month. They are in the running for the autumn's other big book prize, the Governor General's Literary Awards. The winners of that prize will be announced Nov 27 in Montreal.

NATIONAL POST

best bets

A SELECTION OF EVENTS HAPPENING TODAY

POP

Sea Wolf. Sometimes simple songs can be the most affecting. Alex Brown Church's dark, hopeful acoustic ballads don't need bells and whistles – in fact, they'd rather not. Fans of Iron and Wine will find something to like in this L.A. outfit's new disc Leaves in the River. Sea Wolf plays at Le Salle Rossa, 4848 St. Laurent Blvd., with Receivers and Sarah Cocheran. Tickets $12 at the door. 514-284-0122. (T'Cha Dunlevy)

JAZZ

Saxophonist Yannick Rieu (above) is recording his CD at the Diese Onze Jazz Club, 4115A St. Denis St. Rieu will be fronting a sextet and the music starts at 9:30 p.m. 514-225-3545. (Irwin Block)

FILM

Romanian Film Festival. Today's screenings include: The Forest Girl, directed by Nicolae Margineanu, 5 p.m.; Look Ahead With Anger, directed by Nicolae Margineanu, 7 p.m.; Fiancées of America, directed by Nicolae Margineanu, 9 p.m. All films are in Romanian with French subtitles. www.cinemadujour.com or 514-281-1900. (John Griffin)

Cinemania Film Festival. Jean de la Fontaine, le défi (Jean de la Fontaine). The famed 17th-century French writer is given the full-on period costume extravaganza biotreatment, packed with dazzling sets, funny food, oceans of wine and spectacularly outfitted women, all mightily enjoyed by the title character, played by Lorànt Deutsch. Screens at 3 p.m. at Imperial Cinema, 1430 Bleury St. (JG)

To see the complete week's listings online, go to www.montrealgazette.com and click on the **City Guides: Montreal** link. You can search by venue, events, date and category.

AT CINEMANIA TODAY

1 p.m.: Je m'appelle Elizabeth (Call Me Elizabeth)
3 p.m.: Si le vent souleve les sables (Sounds of Sand)
5 p.m.: Jean de la Fontaine, le défi (Jean de la Fontaine)
7 p.m.: Dialogue avec mon jardinier (Conversations With My Gardener)
9:30 p.m.: / Parais voilà être un danseur (Gone For a Dance)

Information: All films screen at the Imperial Cinema, 1430 Bleury St. Films are in French with English subtitles. Tickets: general, $10; students and seniors, $7.50. For a full schedule, visit www.cinemanafilmfestival.com.

CINEMANIA MANIA: For capsule reviews of some festival films and Gazette film critic John Griffin's feature on the women behind the event, go to **montrealgazette.com/artslife**

LIST Quebec leads in amount of market share controlled by independents

CONTINUED FROM D1

These numbers are aberrant because Quebec sells the most records per capita and its homegrown industry is comprised of some 85 per cent independents (i.e., not controlled by multinational corporations), something no other music industry in the world can boast. And, according to the Association québécoise de l'industrie du disque, du spectacle et de la vidéo (ADISQ), about 45 per cent of records purchased in la belle province are produced here, an astonishing display of fan loyalty and listeners' taste. Quebecers were passionate about their music long before others across the nation were buying Canadian.

Little wonder La Presse headlined last week's reportage on the book: "Une insulte aux artistes francos."

The book's premise – pride in Canadian product – is worthwhile. Not so long ago, as Tom Harrison of the Vancouver Sun points out, there was "an unspoken assumption that if it originated here, it couldn't be any good. We tried to emulate the Americans or British and looked second-rate." It's all different now. Mersereau adds. "That pride (in Canadian music) has been so instilled. 'We can't be Canadian' is an attitude that's gone. There is no rush to cross the border anymore."

Apparently there was no rush to cross the border into Quebec, either.

Harmonium seems to be the only francophone group the experts have heard of, with three albums on the list (L'heptade at No. 48, Si on avait besoin d'une cinquieme saison at No. 56 and their eponymous debut at No. 77). They, and chansonnier Ferland (Jaune at No. 71) are worthy, but they amount to little more than tokenism.

Eight by Neil Young

The list is larded with eight albums by Neil Young (including two of the Top 3, Harvest and After the Gold Rush), five each by Joni Mitchell (runner-up with Blue) and Gordon Lightfoot, and four apiece by the Tragically Hip and Gene Pitney.

But there's nothing by Robert Charlebois, described in 1970 by Village Voice critic Richard Goldstein as "the Dylan of Quebec." There's no Michel Pagliaro, the first Canadian to earn gold records in both official languages. Kate & Anna McGarrigle, whose French Album became a cult item in the U.S. and Britain, are missing. Jean Leloup, whose Le Dôme was arguably the finest Quebec album of the 1990s (and whose Mexico, from 2006, is even better), isn't represented (giving new meaning to his recent nickname Deadwood). What about Beau Dommage, whose phenomenal sales within the province dwarfed those of homegrown products by other Canadians in the 1970s? Well, too bad.

Pierre Lapointe – whose platinum-selling avant-pop chansons (La forêt des mal-aimés) attracted 100,000 fans to his FrancoFolies concert with l'Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal last summer – is an invisible man. Daniel Bélanger, whose 2001 Rêver mieux sold 300,000 copies in Quebec, might as well be vapour. So too for Arianne Moffatt, whose debut Aquanaute made her a heroine for Generation Y of Quebec, and Diane Dufresne, the original Canadian diva, whose work was reviewed in U.S. magazine Creem by Richard Meltzer (who penned a lengthy 1977 article on Quebec music)? Not to mention Benoît Charest, who performed a song from the best-selling soundtrack he composed for the animated feature Les Triplettes de Belleville at the 2005 Academy Awards show.

More hip than the Hip

Godspeed You! Black Emperor – who have more currency among global hipsters than, say, The Tragically Hip, and whose Mile End operations (the Hotel2Tango studio and Casa de Popolo) are a magnet for musicians and fans from the rest of Canada – might as well burn in hell. Pioneering cross-genre metal band GrimSkunk, multi-linguists who've performed around the planet, may as well be playing on Mars. So too for Malajube, who perform in French on three continents. As for René Lussier's sample-heavy, ahead-of-its-time 1989 masterpiece La trieur de la langue, the experimental guitarist-singer might try recording in Greek next time. Ditto for rap trio Loco Locass's dense opus Amour Oral, arguably the most incendiary – and artistic – hip-hop album made in Canada.

Not even Céline Dion

And, if the mainstream is your cup of tea, international success stories like Starmania and Céline Dion are amongst the MIAs. Charles Dutoit's widely popular classical recordings of the classical French repertoire with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra might as well be Musak.

Mersereau has said that the "hallmark of Canadiana" is that "we're very open-minded," and that he "wanted as many people as possible ... (and) all corners to be heard." But where does his view leave Quebec and Montreal, birthplace of the Canadian recording industry?

Proportional representation of francophone Quebecers among Mersereau's list of experts would have changed the make-up of The Top 100 Canadian Albums. But it also might have cut into sales among English Canadians.

Quebecers have catholic and idiosyncratic musical tastes. Its singers and musicians do not slavishly imitate French or anglo-American models. Its music fans march to different drummers (putting British prog-rock like Genesis on the North American map). Quebec sait faire? Canada's first modern state-of-the-art recording studio was built by André Perry; it's where Ferland's Jaune, Canada's first concept album, was recorded (before the likes of Cat Stevens and the Police followed suit).

While the Canadian – and Quebec – music industry is world class, Mersereau's methodology is pure bush league, almost guaranteeing that bestselling acts dominate at the expense of a wider variety of artists. He awarded 10 points for each first choice, 9 for the second ... and so on. Yet, when you think back over 40 years or so of great Canadian music, it's obvious there's very little separating a top pick and a 10th. It might have been wiser to adopt former Village Voice critic Robert Christgau's method in his renowned Pazz & Jop yearend polls, whereby critics were given 100 points to play with so that albums got truly comparative weights, resulting in a list that added credibility to consensus and avoided conventional wisdom.

Put it this way: While some of us may have a soft spot for Stompin' Tom Connors, is Bud the Spud and Other Favourites (from 1965) really better than Mitchell's path-breaking 1975 jazz fusion The Hissing of Summer Lawns? Is this what Mersereau means by the book triggering arguments?

Mersereau's inability to face all the music created in Canada in a cogent critical manner is disturbing.

La Presse wasn't asked

For the record, Alain Brunet of La Presse – and dean of local French-language music critics – was not asked for his opinions. Indeed, La Presse, Le Journal de Montréal and The Gazette were shut out. Major observers of "la scène locale" like Patrick Baillargeon and Olivier Robillard Laveaux of Voir aren't there.

I will continue to purchase Québécois and Canadian records according to the standards by which I choose international fare. Just don't expect me to buy this bogus book.

rodriguez.music@gmail.com

WORDS & MUSIC: For more coverage and commentary from the best music writers in the city, including T'Cha Dunlevy's dispatches from the album-launch-parties for some of the hottest acts in town, go to **montrealgazette.com/music**

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